

**West Nile virus prevention starts with you** — *Get rid of mosquito breeding habitat near your house and avoid mosquito bites*

The coming of spring has Washington residents thinking of gardening, hiking and outdoor fun. It's also time to think about preventing West Nile virus infection.

Last year was the first year West Nile virus infection occurred among Washington residents following infection acquired in the state — two residents from Pierce County and one from Clark. Environmental monitoring detected six horses and 13 dead birds with West Nile infection.

"The best protection against West Nile virus infection is avoiding mosquito bites, and now's the time to start," said Nancy Napolilli of the state Department of Health's Office of Environmental Health and Safety. "The warm, wet spring season in our state also starts the mosquito-breeding season, so it's vital to get rid of the habitat mosquitoes favor around your home."

Mosquito breeding habitat can be reduced by changing the water in birdbaths, fountains, wading pools, and animal troughs twice a week. Empty anything that holds standing water — old tires, buckets, plastic covers, flowerpots, and toys. That will help eliminate small puddles of water where many mosquito species breed. Check for containers or trash in places that may be hard to see, such as under bushes or under your home. Make sure roof gutters drain properly, and clean clogged gutters in the spring and fall. Fix leaky outdoor faucets and sprinklers. Cover boats or store upside down or in a dry place. Make sure windows and doors are "bug tight" or fix them.

Avoid mosquito bites by staying indoors around dawn and dusk when mosquitoes are most active. Wear a long sleeve shirt, long pants, and a hat when going into mosquito-infested areas, such as wetlands or woods. Use an effective mosquito repellent if you're out when mosquitoes are active. Take special care when using repellent on children. Read the label and carefully follow the instructions.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web page has more information on insect repellents (<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/RepellentUpdates.htm>). West Nile virus is often found in dead birds in an area before it shows up in people. Mosquitoes become infected by feeding on infected birds, and then pass the virus to other birds, horses, or humans. Most people bitten by an infected mosquito won't show signs of illness. Some may develop mild flu-like symptoms that go away without treatment. The infection causes serious illness in a small number of cases. People over age 50 have the highest risk for serious illness.

There is no vaccine for people, but vaccinations are available for horses. Horse owners should contact their veterinarians for more information.

The state Department of Health is working with local health partners to look for signs of West Nile virus in the environment. Monitoring — including dead bird testing — resumes this spring. Health agencies are working with other state agencies, including the Departments of Agriculture, Ecology, and Fish and Wildlife on West Nile virus monitoring, planning, control and prevention.

The Department of Health West Nile virus information line 1-866-78-VIRUS (1-866-788-4787) and the agency's West Nile virus Web site ([www.doh.wa.gov/WNV](http://www.doh.wa.gov/WNV)) are excellent resources for anyone who wants to learn more.